

Medical Society in the Early 1900s

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The Archives Section of the Hawaii Medical Library contains bound volumes of printed transactions of the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society Annual Meetings beginning in 1904, and minutes of the monthly meetings of the Society from December 2, 1905. During the monthly meetings, papers were read, cases presented, specimens shown, and business conducted. The latter often concerned problems or ideas that have continued to reappear and stimulate and/or frustrate members to this day.

In 1956 Dr Harry Arnold, Jr, wrote a comprehensive article in the *Hawaii Medical Journal* tracing the history of the medical society.¹ There is a gap of 34 years between the granting of the charter for a medical society and its initial meetings, and a revival of the society in 1892 when records show Dr John S. McGrew became president. There is no available record to explain why the organization discontinued for a number of years or why it was revived. However, a letter written to the Society in 1913 by Dr Robert P. Myer does give a very brief personal account. He writes of a reorganizing meeting of "all the Doctors of the Islands" at the Board of Health offices, and of a conversation the prior evening with Dr Armitage. Dr Myers says he told Dr Armitage what he planned to do the next day and that "the minutes will show Dr McGrew elected President...Howard, and he was elected VP and I, Secy." The letter does not give a date for this meeting, but it was either 1892 when Dr McGrew is first listed as president, or in 1895 when the officers elected are recorded as Dr McGrew, President; Dr H.W. Howard, Vice President; and Dr R.P. Myers, Secretary.

The monthly meetings were held in a doctor's office, usually that of the president. This was not entirely satisfactory as some members apparently did not attend if the meeting was held in certain doctors' offices. In his President's Address at the 13th Annual Meeting in 1904, Dr W.L. Moore said "... it seems proper to suggest that permanent quarters for the Society in Honolulu with the nucleus of a library, with a reading room and rooms for discussion are necessary." In the December 7, 1907 minutes the Committee on Permanent Location reported "upon two locations and also on the whole question. It was moved and seconded that the house on Alakea Street be rented for \$5 per month. At the January 4, 1908 meeting the question was again discussed. It was thought "the extra subscription necessary to pay \$5 per month as rental...would be very difficult to collect from the members." It was decided to notify the membership of the intention to have a permanent location with Dr Humphris a committee of one to "lay before them the advantages of such action." Dr Humphris reported back at the March 7, 1908 meeting that "a circular letter was sent out and practically all replies were in favor of permanent location." The report was received and the committee discharged. The Committee on Permanent Housing reported progress in May of 1908. However, whatever progress was being made, the attempt to find permanent housing is not brought up again in the minutes for another six years. The meetings continued to be held in doctor's offices or in the offices of the Board of Health.

Later the University Club became the site of the meetings and was used in 1914 and 1915. However, in the minutes of December 4, 1914, Dr Cooper "considers that the Society should have some regular meeting place and not be dependent upon the generosity of the University Club and states that he believes that sufficient room can be obtained in the Bungalow which should also serve as a nucleus for the establishment of a library and a medical club." A committee was appointed to investigate the possibility of such an arrangement, and letters between the medical society, Governor Lucius E. Pinkham, and the superintendent of Public Works followed. The superintendent, Charles R. Forbes, wrote to Dr Cooper that he found the premises to be filthy and in bad repair. He directed that the "quarters, as selected by you, be cleaned, and I am asking for a figure for the repapering of two rooms and a hall." At the January 8, 1915 monthly meeting, Dr Cooper, as chair of the Housing Committee, reported he had been able to obtain two rooms in the Bungalow and that they were freshly painted and repapered. The February 5, 1915 meeting was held in the quarters of the Society, the Bungalow Building. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be a permanent location. There was a problem of setting up telephone communications for the Bungalow. In the December 3, 1915 meeting, Dr Sinclair brought up the matter of the United Service Medical Society having used the rooms for its meetings without asking permission. At the January 7, 1916 meeting at the University Club, it was learned that the acting superintendent of Public Works had given permission for the United Service Medical Society to meet in the rooms "on the assumption that the Territory had fitted up the rooms for the Medical Society." The House Committee was instructed to search for new quarters and it was suggested that they work in conjunction with the dental society. The following meeting (February 4, 1916) the House Committee reported that the superintendent of Queen's Hospital "had offered a room at the Hospital to the medical and dental societies for their library and meetings." It was agreed to accept the offer. The March 3, 1916 meeting was held in the *Medical Society Room* at the Queen's Hospital, and the Society continued to meet there at least into the 1920s.

Most of the monthly meetings were attended by 12 to 15 members in the early years of the century with a nucleus of about 10 members who attended most consistently. The difficulty of getting members to attend regularly was noted in several of the Presidents' Addresses at the Annual Meetings. In 1907, Dr A.G. Hodgins said, "It is surely not asking too much of any one of us to set aside just one evening a month for this Society as the greater number present, the more benefit we will receive from the excellent discussions which will ensue." Dr A.N. Sinclair, in 1908, said, "The meetings have been none too well attended...I am assured every member has the welfare of the Society at heart, but some are inclined to be apathetic, especially in regard to attending the monthly meetings. They rely upon others to make a good attendance. There is no greater mistake possible, if the Society is to prosper and succeed in its purposes."

Finally, in 1909 Dr J.R. Judd remarked, "It is a matter of regret that more members from the other islands do not find it possible to meet with us..."

The problem of Neighbor Island membership was addressed in June, 1911 when the following executive committee report is recorded:

The executive committee of the Society [has] considered the question of County Societies and constitution and bylaws for the same and beg to recommend as follows: That the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society be continued along lines similar to present ones but that the constitution thereof be amended or redrafted to allow the organization of county societies throughout the Territory, said county societies to be entitled to representation in the Territorial Medical Society.

Although the changes were made as directed, it was a rather cumbersome arrangement and some years later, with advice from the AMA, the relationship of the county societies was better defined to conform with state societies on the Mainland.

The dues of the Society are mentioned in the minutes of December 1, 1906 in the form of the following motion: "that the annual dues of city members be \$5 and those of members outside of Honolulu remain at \$2 as heretofore." One month's notice had been given regarding this increase; the motion was carried unanimously.

From the earliest available minutes, it is evident that the Society was actively involved in introducing bills and monitoring legislation, usually through the Legislative Committee. In 1907 the Society had introduced a revision of the *Laws...Relating to the Practice of Medicine and Surgery*. A special meeting of the Society was held for the Legislative Committee to present the proposed bill to the members. A copy of the bill was sent to each member before the special meeting. The bill was introduced in the House by Representative Rawlins. Even then, however, it was not an automatic passage through the legislature, as evidenced by the remarks of A.G. Hodgins in his President's Address of 1907:

When we endeavor to protect the public by better medical laws or by the prosecution of a quack, we are accused of selfish interests, but in the case of epidemics we have to bear the brunt of the battle in stamping out the disease and then we are humiliated beyond measure when we ask for any medical legislation...Our last Legislature took a different view of things when we presented a bill exactly like that of the state of California to regulate the practice of medicine.

In 1908 President A.N. Sinclair was moved to remark:

...I refer to the endeavors of this Society to perfect the laws regulating the practice of medicine in this Territory. In the past, our efforts in this direction have met with nothing but accusations of mercenary and other personal motives. The membership of the Society has been alluded to as *The Medical Trust*, and other terms...The legislature meets again this year. Let it be the aim of each one of us to accomplish the passage of the bill presented at the last session of the legislature.

Finally, in 1909 the chair of the Legislative Committee reported on the amendments to the medical law that had passed the Legislature, and he expressed satisfaction with the result.

The Society had an ongoing relationship with the Board of Health which varied in its strength depending on the president of the Board. The Board president was apparently invited to the monthly meetings but only Messrs Pinkham and Mott-Smith were regular attendees and developed a good dialogue with Society members. It was advantageous for the Board of Health president to attend the meetings since discussions often involved public health issues. Mental health treatment and facilities engendered discussions that could come from today's newspapers. For example, at the monthly meeting held on February 2, 1907, Dr Emerson presented a "schol-

arly report of the Committee on 'Committals to the Insane Asylum.'" Mr Pinkham was invited to remark after the presentation, and he said "the chief fault lay in the lack of funds to carry out the work... let anyone give the money and buildings, more commodious... would be quickly provided." In 1909 the members addressed the problem of the use of the term "Hawaiian fever" and passed a resolution to write to the Board of Health as follows: "Whereas the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society does not recognize the term Hawaiian fever, the Society would respectfully ask the (meaning) of said term as used in the Board of Health reports." The final resolution to the Board of Health also included a second part dealing with the control of typhoid. This portion of the resolution reads:

Whereas, it is brought to the attention of the Board of Health through its agents, that in many outlying districts (in cases where the water supply is good) fly infection from dejecta of typhoid fever patients is the chief cause of typhoid fever, the Society wishes to put itself on record as being heartily in favor of the screening or flushing of closets, or some other method of minimizing this source of infection.

The Board of Health replied in a letter dated April 13, 1909:

Relative to your letter of February 1, 1909, which was presented at a meeting of the Board of Health held February 24, 1909, and referred to a special committee...we beg to submit the following facts: The acceptance of the term Hawaiian fever was handed down to the present Board, and we fully realize the term is far from being a technical one. We, therefore, intend recommending that physicians be notified that the term Hawaiian Fever will not be further accepted as a cause of death; will further recommend that the disease hereafter be recorded as *Para-typhoid*, provided all clinical evidence show such to be the case...

The Board then stated that the medical society is the body that should classify the disease and that "we would respectfully suggest that the Society investigate and properly classify this disease."

Dr Sinclair was appointed chair of the committee to investigate Hawaiian fever and recommended that a letter be sent to all physicians on the Islands requesting their experience and judgment in the matter. At the next meeting (July 10, 1909), Dr Sinclair reported on the results of the responses and that the answers formed the basis for the committee's recommendation:

That Hawaiian fever, or a febrile condition peculiar to Hawaii does not exist.

That the only definite febrile condition is that of simple continued fever, common all over the world and never fatal.

That no death certificate signifying that the death was due to HF should be accepted by registrars. But this committee disapproves of every death resulting from an indefinite fever (or imputatively HF) being necessarily reported as paratyphoid. This committee believes that every physician should be allowed the liberty of exercising his judgment to its full extent.

The report of the committee was accepted and a letter sent to the Board of Health.

The Society would regularly attempt to convince the Governor to appoint a physician as president of the Board of Health whenever the position became vacant, but with apparently limited success.

There is evidence the Society disciplined members: the most striking case being that of Dr J. Chris O'Day. The minutes of May 2, 1908 list a Dr O'Day of Oil City, Pennsylvania in attendance. Dr O'Day made some flattering remarks about Dr Judd who had operated on his daughter for appendicitis and said that there was no truth to the report that he was leaving because Queen's Hospital would not allow him to treat ward patients. He was leaving because he was homesick. Dr O'Day was present at the Annual Meeting in

November 1908 as an invited guest. At that time, he was proposed for membership and after credential review he was elected a member at the December 5, 1908 meeting. During the next meeting, Dr O'Day gave an "exceedingly interesting and much instructive paper on gastric ulcer" and engendered a lively discussion by the members. The difficulty arose in November 1909 and there followed many references to Dr O'Day over the next several years, often with little detail as to why he was expelled from the Society. However, a complete summary is provided in a four-page letter to the Society by Dr A.N. Sinclair on April 2, 1920 after he had met with the secretary of the AMA about the case. The following excerpts are from that letter:

...in November 1909, Dr O'Day was responsible for a newspaper article in which it was charged that, in effect, property owners, particularly Hawaiians, were frequently railroaded to Molokai unjustifiably, as lepers, by the medical men of Hawaii, acting at the behest of the plantation interests, who thereby secured the property for their own use.

The matter was brought before the medical society in the form of charges in early 1910, and Dr O'Day was asked to appear before the Executive Committee to respond. He refused to do so. Dr O'Day was expelled from the Society on February 5, 1910 after refusing repeated opportunities to meet with the members.

Dr O'Day soon after went to Portland, Oregon still under the ban of expulsion from the Medical Society of Hawaii, and that he was there made a member of the Portland Society, in contravention of the laws regulating membership in such Societies, as laid down by the American Medical Association—and this although the Secretary of the AMA had been notified of the expulsion...

Dr O'Day returned to the islands in 1917 and applied for membership in the Society by transfer from the Portland Society. The transfer was refused on the grounds that his membership in the Portland Society was illegal. The Hawaii Medical Society maintained that Dr O'Day "...could only regain his membership...in one of two ways. First: By admitting the truth of the charges made against him in 1910, making a public retraction thereof...Second: By requesting a reopening of his case, and fighting the charges to their ultimate conclusion." Another problem—the minutes of the meeting when Dr O'Day was expelled were lost and the AMA advised Dr Sinclair to have an official amendment to the minutes passed in which the expulsion is clearly stated. This was done and sent to the Judicial Council of the AMA. The members of the Society said beyond the specific charges against Dr O'Day, the case was vital to the AMA and the constituent societies because of the action of the Portland Society in accepting Dr O'Day for membership when he had been expelled from the Hawaii Medical Society. A report back to the Medical Society regarding the decision of the Judicial Council has not been located. At the May 4, 1917 meeting a very heated discussion had occurred, as noted in the minutes, over the fact that Queen's Hospital had granted Dr O'Day privileges. The discussion included comments regarding the role of the hospital staff in approving members (no one from the hospital staff had been present at the Trustees' meeting). Some believed a physician needed to be a member of the medical society, as well as being licensed, before being considered for staff privileges. Others warned against insulting the Trustees of the hospital and also against making the complaint too personal.

A motion was made by Dr Judd that a suitable resolution be made expressing the sentiment of the Society on the matter and at the same time the Trustees be notified that a committee from the Society would be pleased to meet the Trustees at their pleasure.

A committee was then appointed. There is no immediate follow-up to this action found in the minutes.

The meetings were not all business; papers were read by members who were often assigned to do so at the previous meeting, clinical reports were given, including showing specimens from cases. There was an emphasis on communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis and leprosy, although surgical topics and other medical problems were also well-represented. At the meeting of August 3, 1907 Dr Brinckerhoff gave a "most interesting talk on 'The Statistics of Leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands.'" He stated that the records "dated back to 1866, since when there have been 5,385 cases segregated and sent to the settlement. The average number of cases apprehended seems to be about 100 a year, although it was as low as 27 in one year. The disease appears in the child and young adult, and was generally of about four years duration, before they were sent to Molokai..." One of the cases presented at the May 1, 1909 meeting was by Dr Moore who reported the case of a child "that had a swelling about McBurney's point." At surgery "about a pint of pus" was evacuated which was thought to come from the appendix; "Later noted curvature of spine and symptoms of Pott's disease." The social standards of the time are reflected in the report of a case by Dr Judd at the July 7, 1906 meeting: "He (Dr Judd) also showed an abdominal tumor which had been removed from a woman after a diagnosis of fibroid tumor, and hysterectomy performed." The following sentence was then crossed out: "The woman's husband had been dead 12 years, but the uterus tumor contained a foetus." The revised minutes continue: "The fibroid uterus contained a foetus of about the 10th week—the history of the case pointed to its having been there 12 years."

Physician visitors from the Mainland were always asked to give a few remarks and occasionally were the main speakers. New techniques and equipment were presented when possible. Dr Lehman of San Francisco made some "interesting remarks on the therapeutic value of the x-rays" at the September 1, 1906 meeting. The minutes then describe in some length the use of x-rays for leukemia, skin diseases, and internal organs. During the meeting of July 11, 1908:

Dr Humphris read a paper on 'Blood Pressure' and gave demonstrations of the Riva-Rocci Sphygmomanometer [sphygmomanometer]. The value of estimating blood pressure in regard to diagnosis and prognosis in syphilis of the brain, eclampsia, cerebral haemorrhage, arteriosclerosis, etc, was brought out. As altered blood pressure may assist(?) if not be a cause of insanity, the importance of its estimation is apparent. By the use of the instrument the blood pressure may be regulated in a scientific way.

They then proceeded to demonstrate on some of the members with the following results: "Dr C.T. Rodgers showed a good pressure; Dr Hodgins normal; Dr Augur who showed the influence of a vegetarian diet; and Dr Straub who showed an excess." Whenever the members traveled they would report to the membership when they returned to the islands. The resulting talks were both medically oriented and also more personal in nature. In 1907 Dr Cofer journeyed to Central America and gave a relatively comprehensive report on the control of yellow fever, plague, and other quarantinable diseases. He reminded the Hawaii physicians that the islands had to stay alert for the possible introduction of these diseases by ships from those areas. "The quarantine and disinfection of ships from there may not be necessary for 30 times; but the thirty-first ship might introduce infection." He reported an interesting method of clearing a room of plague-infected fleas: "The best way to disinfect a plague room, is to turn a lot of clean guinea pigs into the room. The fleas will lodge on the guinea pigs, and the pigs are then chloro-

formed and burned." The annual meeting transactions included some papers presented during the monthly meetings of that year and deemed by the members to be significant enough to warrant publishing for all the members.

The social standards of the time can be appreciated by the Resolutions of Condolence that were drawn up by specially appointed committees at the time of deaths of members or someone in their families. It can also be seen in the language used by Dr Humphris in his letter of resignation as President of the Society :

It is with extreme regret that I beg to tender my resignation as President of the Society. Nothing but my absence from the Territory for a very extended period...would cause me to resign from the office to which, through the courtesy of the Society, I was so recently elected. My relations with the Society have ever been of so cordial a nature and my sense of gratification at the honor of the position I am now resigning so extreme that nothing but singleminded sorrow accompanies this resignation...

The overall impression of the members of the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society in the early years of this century is that of sincere, conscientious, and dedicated medical professionals who were well-educated and up-to-date. They enjoyed medical practice and a strong obligation to protect the lives of the citizens of the Territory. That they were not always as successful as they would have wished when dealing with the legislature and newspapers should reassure our contemporary members and officers that the present difficulties have been shared in principle, if not in substance, with those who have preceded them. It also should give a glimpse into the future for the next century: the subject of the problems may change, but the source of conflicts and frustrations will probably continue to be very similar.

The physicians practicing in the Territory in the early 1900s believed they were unique in some ways as expressed by Dr W.L. Moore in his President's Address of 1904 :

Hawaii, situated in the midst of the great North Pacific Ocean, is not only the crossroads of the Pacific, but it constitutes the extreme frontier of Western civilization, and for this reason great responsibilities devolve upon us scarcely equalled, and not excelled, in any other locality.

The present members of the Hawaii Medical Association can be proud of the work of those early physicians and of the medical society they nurtured and supported.

References

1. Arnold HL, Jr. Hawaii Medical Association, 1856-1956. *Hawaii Med J.* 1956;15:313-324.
2. Minutes at the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society. Dec 2, 1905-Apr 2, 1920.
3. Transactions of the Hawaii Territorial Medical Society Annual Meetings. 1904-1920.

Historical Notes

by John A. Breinich

This special issue of the *Journal* demonstrates the rich history of Hawaii medicine. Hawaii Medical Library is dedicated to collecting and preserving our medical history and the Archives section of the library has significant collections used by researchers, historians, and anyone looking for information in our unique subject area. The photograph collection has more than 5,000 photos individually cataloged and maintained in acid-free storage envelopes. The basis of this collection comes from the Hawaii Medical Association file of photographs of past and present members, but we are always looking for additions to the collection. The medical instruments collection has been donated by physicians, hospitals, and family members and includes interesting historical instruments from around the world. This collection is currently being cataloged and limited preservation work is being done as funds permit. We are hoping someday to have a medical museum and this growing collection will then be more fully displayed and available for researchers.

Personal papers are another valuable part of the Archives collection. We have the past minutes of the Hawaii Medical Association and are in the process of transcribing the early minutes from 1904 to 1930 for easier use and electronic access. Personal papers, memoirs, and unpublished materials from

► Continued on Page 784



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